

White Clay Creek Presbyterian Church  
Northwest corner of intersection of  
Robert Kirkwood Highway (Capitol Trail)  
and Polly Drummond Hill Road  
Newark Vicinity (Harmony, Mill Creek Hundred)  
New Castle County  
Delaware

HABS No. DEL-160

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Eastern Office, Design and Construction  
143 South Third Street  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
WHITE CLAY CREEK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

HABS No. DEL-160 HABS  
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Location: Northwest corner of intersection of Robert Kirkwood Highway (Capitol Trail) and Polly Drummond Hill Road; Newark Vicinity (Harmony, Mill Creek Hundred), New Castle County, Delaware.

Present Owner: Trustees of the White Clay Creek Presbyterian Church.

Present Occupant: White Clay Creek Presbyterian Church.

Present Use: Sanctuary.

Statement of Significance: A rural mid-nineteenth century church structure of ample proportions and interesting decorative detail.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: Trustees of the White Clay Creek Presbyterian Church.
2. Date of erection: 1855-56; dedicated on May 1, 1856.
3. Original plans, construction: The large rectangular, brick structure is little altered from the original plan. Minor alterations have been made in the basement in former church schoolrooms.

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: Meetings were held in the vicinity of White Clay Presbyterian Church beginning in 1712. A congregation was organized in 1722 by the Rev. George Gillespie and a log meetinghouse was built. The site of this church was about one mile to the north, at Polly Drummond's Hill.

The deed for the present site was given by Joseph England to a board of trustees on May 25, 1752. A church was built and stood for 103 years. The church was incorporated on September 11, 1787. The present church was built, of brick, in 1855-56. It was dedicated on May 1, 1856, by Rev. H. S. Clarke. There is a large graveyard enclosed with an iron fence in front of the church. The oldest legible inscription is reportedly on the tomb of William McMechen, who died in October 1738. Mr. McMechen was a member of the first Board of Trustees.

- C. Sources of Information: Zebley, Frank R. The Churches of Delaware. Wilmington: Frank R. Zebley, 1947.

Prepared by William B. Bassett  
Architectural Historian  
National Park Service  
with the cooperation of  
Robert L. Raley, AIA  
June 1965.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: An amply proportioned mid-nineteenth century brick church on a raised basement with brick pilasters and simple "classical" exterior details. It is particularly noteworthy for the pressed sheet metal interior wall and ceiling finish.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent maintenance throughout.

### B. Description of Exterior

1. Number of stories: One story on raised basement.
2. Number of bays: Three-bay front by five-bay side.
3. Over-all dimensions: 40' wide by 60' in length.
4. Layout--shape: Rectangle.
5. Foundations: Dry granite rubble.
6. Wall construction: Red brick, common bond (with header bond every eighth row) with brick pilasters (four on each side, one each corner, two on front).
7. Porches: A small enclosed wooden frame and glazed vestibule porch at main entrance has been added since 1958.
8. Chimneys: One red brick outside chimney along northern portion of west facade.
9. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: High wooden frontispiece at center of south facade has narrow molded entablature on consoles. Within this framework there are double wooden entry doors with 3x5 lights, glazed upper portion in each. There are wooden paneled sections overhead.

- b. Windows and shutters: First floor--five tall rectangular windows (approximately 3' wide by 12' high) at each side of the church, and two such windows on front (south) facade of which four on each side of nave have stained glass in rectangular patterns of red, blue, and gold.

Basement--five double-hung windows (six-over-six lights) each side and two double-hung windows (six-over-six lights) on front (south) facade.

10. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Gable roof with tar paper shingles on plywood over 3" x 4" roof rafters on 5" x 5" purlins on 6" x 8" rafters braced by 6x8's with 6" x 12" ceiling joists on metal tie hangers. Pedimented gable ends on front and rear. Each pediment contains a triangular wooden louvered opening.
- b. Cornice, eaves: A cyma recta, box and molded (lower portion) wooden cornice and eaves, all painted white.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: None.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: Main floor--Open hall plan with vestibule under rectangular south balcony. A center aisle separates two sets of ten flanking pews with an aisle on each outer side. Altar and choir pews flank the north altar and are raised three steps from the main pews. The rectangular balcony across the south end of the church has four levels for collapsible chairs and is serviced by flanking stairways to the upper vestibule below.

Basement--Main entry at ground level on south facade gives access to entry vestibule with two flanking stairways up to main floor. Former church schoolroom to north of entry vestibule; a kitchen and a meeting room north of this.

2. Stairways: Basement to main floor--two solid newel, two-run, wooden stairways with 15 risers each (flanking the main entry at ground level). They have mahogany handrails above vertical board siding.

Main floor to balcony--two wooden stairways with 16 risers each (flanking the upper vestibule); two perpendicular runs each.

3. Flooring: 2 1/2" yellow pine boards covered with carpeting in church proper.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: "Gothic" pattern is pressed sheet metal painted white, at sides and rear. Plaster wall at front (north) of church. Large sheet metal cove cornice on all sides. Flat ceiling of pressed sheet metal in square and rectangular patterns. Large floral surround of plaster or of metal at center ceiling light. Plaster walls and ceilings in other spaces.
5. Doorways and doors: Center wooden paneled double door with segmental arch top at center aisle at rear of church leads to upper vestibule. A metal fire door behind the cloth reredos leads to a metal fire escape constructed in 1964. Wooden paneled doors on stair landings to balcony.
6. Decorative features and trim: Four fluted cast iron columns in former church schoolroom in raised basement have palm leaf capitals. They mark off bays 12' x 15'. The large open sanctuary has a wooden vertical beaded-board wainscoting (3' high) and woodwork painted white with mahogany trim on pews (added since 1958).
7. Lighting: Seven metal "Gothic" electric light fixtures hang on metal chains in the sanctuary.
8. Heating: Hot air heat, with floor outlets in church sanctuary.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: The church front faces approximately due south with the center aisle in a north-south direction. A church cemetery surrounds the structure which lies approximately 80' west of Polly Drummond Hill Road.
2. Outbuildings: A new church school building is located to the north.
3. Landscaping and walls: A concrete walk from the main (south) entry runs along the west side to the driveway of the new church school to the north through a 4' high masonry wall which borders the church grounds on the north and east.

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